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DE RUEHPU #0865/01 1351949
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3032
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1039
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0884
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0462
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0891
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000865

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: HAITI: INAUGURATION DAY PRISON RIOT

REF: PAUP 854

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION DOUGLAS GRIFFITHS FOR REASONS 1.
4(B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Prisoners in the maximum security section of the national penitentiary (known as "Titanic") began rioting hours before President Preval assumed office on the morning of May 14. The prisoners broke the locks on the prison cells and mounted the inner prison walls shouting pro-Preval slogans. HNP specialized crowd control units CIMO and SWAT, along with MINUSTAH military and UNPol officers were called to the scene when the prison guards were unable to contain the prisoners. The riot did not interfere with the inauguration (reftel) and the HNP and MINUSTAH quelled the situation by late morning. U.S. UNPol officers on the scene reported witnessing four dead prisoners and numerous prisoners wounded; 17 prisoners injured, 7 seriously; 15 prison guards injured, none seriously. One U.S. UNPol officer sustained minor injuries. Neither the media nor MINUSTAH or police contacts have been able to confirm the reputed fatalities. While the cause of the riot remains unclear, press reports indicate that the prisoners had proclaimed themselves political prisoners of the interim government and demanded President Preval release them immediately. Overcrowding at the National Penitentiary continue to make conditions ripe for riots. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The May 14 inauguration day prison riot at the national penitentiary began at approximately 0800 a.m. when the UN and local press reported gunshots coming from the National Penitentiary. According to press reports and Embassy police contractor, prisoners in the central cellblock of the penitentiary, dubbed "Titanic," broke the padlocks off their cells and began to roam inside the prison. Some of the prisoners then ascended to the roof of the building. The HNP crowd control unit CIMO and the HNP SWAT team responded to the scene when the prison guards became unable to control the prisoners. U.S. UNPol officers, Chinese FPU and a MINUSTAH military contingent arrived to assist as well. Prison guards attempted to restore order and return the prisoners to their cells. Some prisoners surrendered immediately and returned to the cells, while others continued to mount the walls. Press video and photos show prisoners standing on the wall displaying the body of a dead prisoner.

13. (C) Details on the use of excessive force by prison guards

remain unclear, but U.S. UNPol officers reported witnessing prison guards severely beating prisoners to force them back into the cells (NOTE: U.S. UNPol has informed poloffs that there is a video of the beating the prisoners taken by officers on the scene. Poloffs have not yet viewed the video. END NOTE). During the course of quelling the riot, CIMO and SWAT employed non-lethal tactics and fired six tear gas canisters to force the prisoners back inside their cells.

HNP and MINUSTAH were successful in restoring order before noon. UNPol officers on the scene counted four prisoners dead and 17 prisoners injured, seven seriously. 15 guards and one U.S. UNPOL officer sustained minor injuries.

¶4. (C) Marie-Yolene Gilles of the National Network of Defenders of Human Rights (RNDDH) attempted to enter the prison on the morning of May 15, but was able to gain access due to the continued volatile situation inside the prison. Gilles spoke to the guards at the prison who confirmed several prisoner and prison guard injuries. She visited a prisoner receiving treatment for a minor gunshot wound at the general hospital. Gilles was unable to confirm the four deaths and speculated that the body the prisoners displayed in the media may have died in the infirmary from illness before the incident started.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. The National Penitentiary currently holds over double its intended capacity. Only five percent of the total population at the prison have been formally sentenced while the remainder await habeas corpus proceedings in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. The facility itself is antiquated and poorly maintained, and the prison guards lack the proper non-lethal training and equipment. The unfortunate timing of the riot serves as a reminder of the

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immediate challenges facing Preval's government in the judicial system. END COMMENT.
SANDERSON